DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 616 CG 024 434

AUTHOR Carrier, Lawren A.
TITLE Assisting High School Seniors Who Have Not Made Post Graduation Plans through the Use of Individual and Group Guidance Exercises.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 55p.; Ed.D. Practicum Report, Nova University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Choice; *Career Guidance; Decision Making; Group Counseling; High Schools; *High School Seniors; School Counseling

ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to assist high school seniors who had not made decisions about what they would do after graduation. A series of group and individual guidance experiences was developed to provide students with self-knowledge, and knowledge about the options available to them, in order to provide them with the means to develop a plan of action for after high school. A program was developed which consisted of a series of group and individual sessions which incorporated the use of the "Discover" computer-assisted career exploration program and materials taken from the "Discover for High Schools Career Planning Guidebook." After completing the "Discover" program and exercises with a group of high school seniors who were undecided as to their post-high school plans, a series of tours of local training and employment sites were conducted. The tours were accompanied by group sessions in which the information obtained from each tour was incorporated into each student's post-graduation plan. Analysis of the data revealed that all 15 participants in the career decision making group were able to list a specific plan of action for after graduation, including a time frame, and short-term goals, where appropriate. Some students had already taken action to begin their plan prior to graduation. (Author)

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Assisting High School Seniors Who Have Not Made Post Graduation Plans Through the Use of Individual and Group Guidance Exercises

by

Lawren A. Carrier

Cluster 47

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A Practicum I Report Presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1992

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
TABLE OF CONTENTS		iii
LIST OF FIGURES		iv
Chapter		
I	INTRODUCTION	1
	Description of Community	1
	Writer's Work Setting and Role	1
II	STUDY OF THE PROBLEM	5
	Problem Description	5
	Problem Documentation	5
	Causative Analysis	8
	Relationship of the Problem to the Literature	9
III	ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS	14
	Goals and Expectations	14
	Expected Outcomes	14
	Measurement of Outcomes	14
IV	SOLUTION STRATEGY	16
	Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions	16
	Description and Justification for Selected Solution	20
	Report of Action Taken	21
V	RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	29
	Results	29
	Discussion	31
	Recommendations	35
	Dissemination	36
REFERENCES		38

Appendices Page

A PRE-PRACTICUM SURVEY OF POST GRADUATION PLANS FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS..... 42

B POST-PRACTICUM SURVEY OF POST GRADUATION PLANS FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS..... 44

C REQUEST FOR PERMISSION AND LETTER OF PERMISSION TO USE DISCOVER AS A COMPONENT OF THE PRACTICUM... 46

D FIELD TRIP EVALUATION FORM..... 49

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1 Racial Demographics of High School Students who are Currently Enrolled at the Practicum Site..... 2

2 Economic Characteristics of High School Students who are Currently Enrolled at the Practicum Site..... 3

3 Summary of High School Seniors' Responses to a Survey on Post High School Plans Administered by the Writer in Winter, 1992..... 6

4 Summary of High School Seniors' Responses to the Senior Graduation Survey Adminstered at the Practicum Site by the District Office in Spring, 1991..... 7

5 Summary of Participating High School Seniors' Responses to a Survey on Post High School Plans Administered by the Writer at the End of the Practicum Implementation May 27, 1992..... 30

6 Summary of Short-Term Goals Indicated by Partcipating Seniors Responding to a Survey on Post High School Plans Administered by the Writer at the end of the Practicum Implementation, May 27, 1992..... 31

ABSTRACT

Assisting High School Seniors Who Have Not Made Post Graduation Plans Through the Use of Individual and Group Guidance Exercises. Carrier, Lawren A., 1992: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Career Exploration/Decision Making/Secondary/High School/Post-High School/Guidance.

This practicum was designed to assist high school seniors who had not made decisions about what they would do after graduation. A series of group and individual guidance experiences was developed to provide students with self-knowledge, and knowledge about the options available to them, in order to provide them with the means to develop a plan of action for after high school.

The writer developed a program consisting of a series of group and individual sessions which incorporated the use of the Discover (ACT, 1991) computer-assisted career exploration program and materials taken from the Discover for High Schools Career Planning Guidebook (ACT, 1988). After completing the Discover program and exercises with a group of high school seniors who were undecided as to their post-high school plans, the writer arranged a series of tours of local training and employment sites for the group of students. The tours were accompanied by group sessions in which the information obtained from each tour was incorporated into each student's post graduation plan.

Analysis of the data revealed that all of the fifteen participants in the career decision making group were able to list a specific plan of action for after graduation, including a time frame, and short-term goals, where appropriate. Some students had already taken action to begin their plan prior to graduation.

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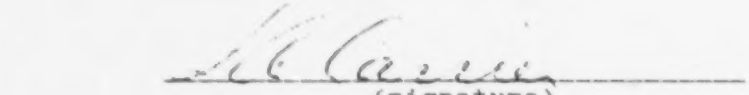
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

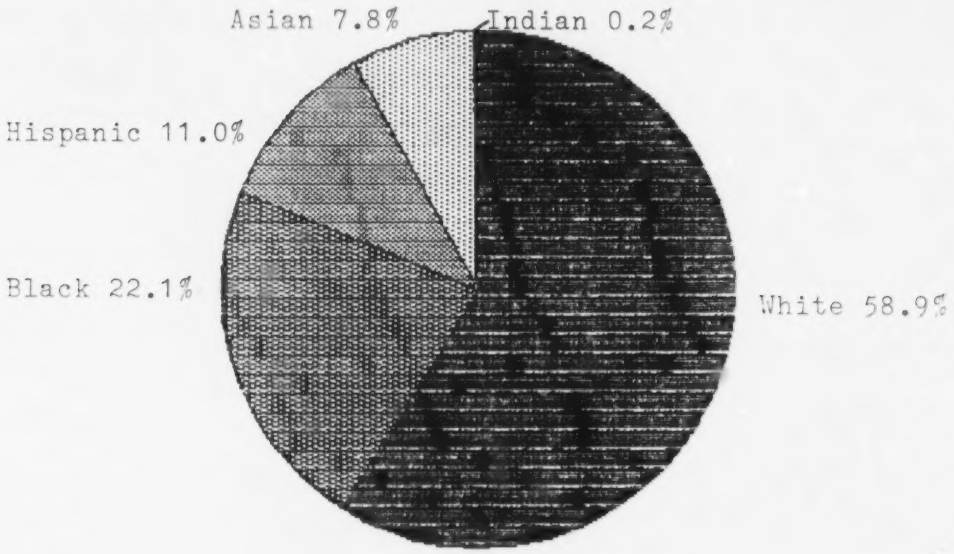
The community in which the practicum was conducted is a neighborhood within a large urban area, located in the southeastern United States. The state's primary industry is tourism, so there is a large need for employees in the service trades. A major military installation is located in this neighborhood, and the military is considered a primary employer in this city. The city is also the twelfth largest commercial shipping port in the nation, so there is a lot of commerce and trade in the area.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The work setting is a senior high school, consisting of grades ten through twelve. It has the lowest enrollment of the fourteen public high schools in the district, with 307 sophomores, 334 juniors, and 305 seniors. The school is situated adjacent to a public housing project, and less than one mile from the major military installation. The student demographics are varied, with many students being the second generation to attend the same high school, while approximately one-third of the

students have lived in another country during some time in their lives. Racial demographics of the student body are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Racial demographics of high school students who are currently enrolled at the practicum site. (N = 953)



Six and one-half percent of students live in funded housing programs, slightly over a third meet guidelines for the federally funded free-reduced meal program, and a third of the students are classified as having parents who are federally connected for purposes of school funding (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Economic characteristics of high school students who are currently enrolled at the practicum site.

At the time of practicum implementation the school was in a transition phase. It was scheduled to be part of a pilot program beginning with the 1992-1993 school year involving the cluster plan of districting schools. The enrollment was expected to increase by one grade level, adding over 300 ninth grade students to its campus. Its two middle school feeders, and their six elementary school feeders would all be located within a geographically proximal area.

The writer is a Guidance Counselor in her sixth year in the field, and at the time of the practicum, was finishing her first

year at a new school assignment. Her Master of Education Degree was awarded in 1974. Prior to working in secondary education, she was employed at a variety of other jobs, including employment counselor for a state agency, nurse recruiter for a private medical personnel recruiting firm, real estate salesperson and property manager. She works with students at all three grade levels in designing, implementing, monitoring and modifying their educational plan. She also assists them with developing adaptive/coping skills, by mediating disputes, and by serving as the student's advocate in academic or disciplinary issues.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The first indication of the problem occured when the writer was approached by a student who stated his concern about what he would do after he graduated in June. During the same week, a second student approached the writer, voicing similar concerns.

The writer then began conducting an informal appraisal of the post graduation plans of her caseload by asking seniors, in the course of conversation, what they were planning to do after graduation. The majority of students indicated that they were going to attend college immediately after high school. Many of the students who indicated that they would attend college were not, in reality, academically elegible to attend a state university.

It became apparent that many of the seniors in the writer's caseload were undecided as to what they would do after graduation.

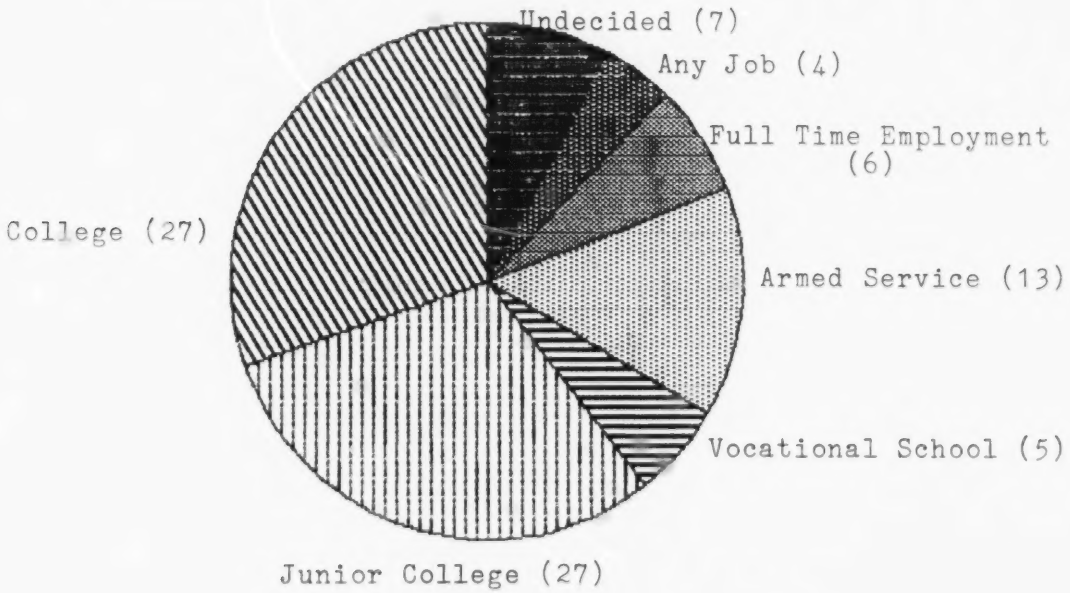
Problem Documentation

In order to more specifically assess the post-graduation plans of the seniors in her caseload, a single item, seven choice

survey was administered in eight of the school's twenty, twelfth grade homerooms (see Appendix A). Those seniors surveyed represented the twelfth grade component of the writer's caseload.

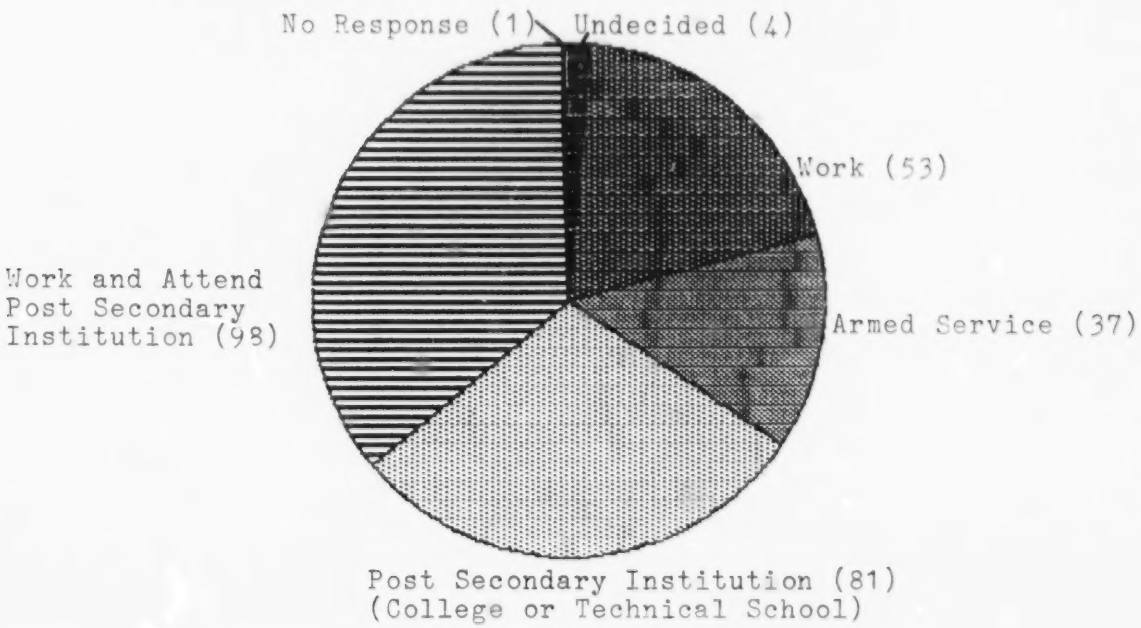
The results of the survey showed that 7 out of the 86 seniors responding answered that they were undecided about what they wanted to do after graduation. Although a high number of seniors indicated that they planned to attend college after high school (see Figure 3), these results should be viewed cautiously, based on previous observations of the incongruity between students' aspirations and their actual academic achievement.

Figure 3. Summary of high school seniors' responses to a survey on post high school plans administered by the writer in Winter, 1992. (N = 86)



School-wide results for the previous year were available from the Senior Graduation Survey, administered at each high school by the district office (see Figure 4). A total of 280 seniors were surveyed at the school prior to their graduation. Although a fewer number of students indicated that they were unsure of their plans after graduation, there was still a majority of students who indicated that they planned to obtain post secondary education of some kind. The survey did not specify the type of post secondary education the respondents planned to pursue.

Figure 4. Summary of high school seniors' responses to the Senior Graduation Survey adminstered at the practicum site by the district office in Spring, 1991. (N = 280)



Note. Data provided by Office of Testing and Evaluation, Hillsborough County Schools, Tampa, FL.

Causative Analysis

The practicum site places a heavy emphasis on the need to attend college. Incoming sophomore students are required to enroll in a reading class, in order to improve their reading skills and test scores. Although all students are required to pass a minimum literacy skills test prior to graduation, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT) are mentioned in relation to improving test scores.

During student assemblies and meetings, the importance of students taking the highest academically challenging courses is emphasized. It is related to ensuring their success in college, with a vague term such as, "or whatever you decide to do," added, ostensibly to accomodate the non-college bound students. College bound students receive regularly scheduled group and individual counseling on college choice, financial aid and scholarships, and have the opportunity to meet with college representatives when they visit the high school campus. Non-college bound students do not receive comparable services.

Informal observation indicated that the prevalent opinion among students was that attending college or entering a branch of the military were the only two options of value open to them after high school. This orientation was observed among college bound and non-college bound students during the course of conversation in the guidance setting.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The need for attending college directly after graduation from high school has become a prevalent attitude among both researchers and high school students. This emphasis on college attendance to the exclusion of other options is evident in the literature, where many student surveys, sponsored by community college systems, do not offer the respondent the option of being undecided (Polk County Community College, 1984), or terminate the survey at the point of the undecided response (Allan & Bartek, 1985; Allan, Bartek, & Runk, 1987). Some of these instruments steer the respondent toward an assessment of the institution, even when the subject has given an "undecided" response to questions about their post-high school plans (Fontana, 1985). These projects appear to skirt the actual needs of high school graduates, and function more as a market survey than an actual post-graduation assessment (Fox, Rimpau, & Steinberg, 1988).

High school counselors also contribute to students' expectations about the need to attend college, by spending more time engaged in activities geared toward college bound students than in working with the non-college bound student in comparable kinds of activities. School administrators perpetuate the idea that higher education, in the form of college, is essential to the survival of most high school students, and have gone so far as to implore colleges to assist with equipping high school students with the basic skills needed to perform successfully in a college setting (McConner, 1982).

The reality of the situation is much less idealistic. Depending on the source, the actual number of students who will not go directly to college from high school may range from 29.5% in a Texas study (Amarillo College, 1987), to as high as 50% nationwide (Lewis, 1990). This variation in results would lead one to question how realistic high school students' goals are at the time of their graduation. Of the students surveyed by Fox, et al. (1988), 13% indicated that they were undecided about their plans for the following year, and 10% were unsure of their long term educational plans. These findings lead the writer to believe that, although the number of seniors who responded to her questionnaire as undecided might be small, there is in reality a larger group of students who are unsure of what they will do after they graduate.

Additional research conducted by Wagenaar (1986) revealed that, of those students who do plan to attend a college directly after graduation, many end up changing their plans downward. These findings further support the writer's observation that many high school seniors have unrealistic expectations or incomplete perceptions of their post-high school plans.

The primary influences upon high school students in career decision making appear to fall into three general categories. Predictably, those people with whom the student has associated the longest, parents, family members and significant others have the greatest influence on a student's post high school planning. Research indicates that this relationship between parental

influence and career decision making is much stronger than one might expect. In a study of influences on choice of career pathway, respondents cited parents as significant influences (Campbell, Gardner, & Winterstein, 1984), and it appears that the parents' influence on career goals and educational aspirations increases during a student's teen years, exceeding the influence of peers (Davies & Kandel, 1982).

In a survey of college bound seniors, 91% of the students questioned listed their family as being most helpful in providing assistance in career decision making (Noeth, Engen, & Noeth, 1984). At the other end of the educational spectrum, vocational students also indicated that they were positively influenced by their parents (Stone & Wang, 1990). Students whose parents held low expectations for them were less likely to indicate a definite post-high school plan than students of parents with high expectations (Wagenaar, 1986).

The second strongest influence on high school students' post graduation planning is the student's peers. This influence can be either helpful or detrimental. In the Noeth, et al. (1984) study, 76% of the respondents indicated that friends were helpful in assisting with career decisions. Other research has indicated that friends tend to exert a negative influence over the career decisions of vocational students (Stone & Wang, 1990). These findings demonstrate that peer influence must be considered carefully in relation to the career decision making activities of high school students.

Surprisingly, guidance counselors were found to exert the least amount of influence on high school students' post graduation plans. In a longitudinal study of 1988 graduates, over one third did not find any counseling services helpful, and counseling was rated second to study habits in things that the graduates would change or improve (Impara, Fortune, & Bruce, 1991). Students in the Noeth, et al. (1984) study identified counselors as providing the least amount of help in the area of occupational planning, with almost half of the respondents indicating that counselors were not helpful in making career decisions. A survey of influences on high school level marketing students revealed that only two out of the ten career influences listed were school based: participation in the marketing program, and friends. Counselors were not mentioned as providing any influence in career decision making (Stone & Wang, 1990).

The above findings have strong implications for addressing the needs of high school seniors who need to develop post graduation plans. The discrepancy between college aspirations and reality is one that cannot be addressed by the high school guidance counselor after the student has graduated. Too much focus in guidance programs has been placed on meeting the needs of college bound students to the exclusion, in many cases, of other students. Coy (1991) points out that among the duties of a guidance counselor is the responsibility to assist high school students with meeting career challenges and making career decisions. Going to college is not a career decision, it is a

career path. The data indicate that the counselor is the weakest point of influence in the high school student's sphere, and that parents and friends serve as stronger sources of influence on issues of career decision making.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and objectives were projected for this practicum. All seniors who participated in the practicum will have established a realistic post graduation plan by the end of the practicum implementation period.

Expected Outcomes

Expected outcomes were that all seniors who participated in the practicum would indicate that they had a definite course of action to follow after graduation, and would be able to outline their plan, with specific dates or time frames for each step. They would be able to answer a survey with regard to post-graduation plans with an answer other than "undecided".

Measurement of Outcomes

Outcomes were to be measured using a modified version of the questionnaire that was administered as a preassessment tool at the beginning of the practicum. The same single item, seven choice survey was to be administered, but the survey included a section in which each student would outline his/her specific plan and time line (see Appendix B). This additional section would

provide each student with the opportunity to describe his/her plan in concrete terms, further solidifying their commitment to their plan.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

Solutions to the problem of high school seniors who are undecided about their post graduation plans fell into three general categories. In a long term setting, such as a life skills or business class, the use of a career education program built around a formal instructional curriculum can be used (Calhoun & Finch, 1984). Stone and Wang (1990) discuss the effectiveness of such a program in the vocational classroom. Such programs are designed to be conducted in a classroom setting, on a daily basis over the span of several weeks.

A career planning program which involves the participation of parents or other significant family members is a second method of assisting high school students with post-high school planning. It is important that such programs serve to strengthen the relationship between parents and school, thus maximizing these two influences on students' career decision making. A handbook of strategies for counselors to use in involving significant others in the high school guidance process provides how-to information for conducting such activities as parent workshops

and creating career planning files (Burkhardt, et al., 1977). Another strategy is to conduct a day long program where parents and students participate together. Students undergo vocational assessment, then the counselor meets with students and parents to review the results and relate them to occupational information in order to provide the participants with tools to use in further career search activities (Castricone, Finan, & Gumble, 1982). After training through workshops, parents can be used as resource persons to staff a school's career center (Daniels, Karmos, & Presley, 1983).

A third method suggested by the literature is the use of structured career guidance programs conducted in a series of group and/or individual sessions. Ducote (1984) suggests three interventions that should take place with students. First, provide self knowledge; second, provide career information and alternatives; third, assist with career preparation. One strategy is the use of a guide which incorporates homeroom teachers as leaders for some of its activities. The program is in workbook format, outlining step-by-step procedures for career decision making, and providing worksheets and materials for student activities (Bush, 1983). A second workbook program contains anecdotal information, activities, advice, and references for further reading by the student. This program covers a range of options, from taking time out after high school, to going into the military after graduation (Fireside, 1989). In providing individual counseling, a problem solving

approach may be employed (Gati, 1986). In such an approach, the student follows a step-by-step paradigm which serves as a process of elimination to reduce the feasible options to one or two.

Career decision making in the high school can be addressed as a longitudinal, or developmental process, which begins in the ninth grade, and continues through a student's senior year (Emerson, 1987). In such a program, specific activities are structured for students at each grade level, with the culmination of the process being a series of career nights held for the school's seniors. This process requires the establishment of a career center, where students' career folders are maintained throughout their high school years.

Career days, college nights, and field trips to local businesses, vocational schools and junior colleges are a means of familiarizing students on a first-hand basis with their post-high school options.

Another method for exposing students to occupational and educational information is through the use of computer-guided exploration programs. These programs have the advantage of providing a large amount of current and accurate information at the user's fingertips (Thompson & LaRochelle, 1985). It is important, however, to make certain that the user does not become overwhelmed with the huge amount of information that is available through computer-guided career exploration programs (Gati & Tikotzki, 1989). Research with the Discover program has indicated that such programs can be used as an integral part of

career guidance services (Sampson, Shahnasarian, & Reardon, 1985), but that lower level students may have more difficulty gleaning useful information from the myriad data available (Roselle & Thomas, 1988).

In evaluating the above proposed solutions, the following observations were made. With a three month implementation period, there was not adequate time to establish and execute a career education curriculum, or to set up a longitudinal program such as the one described by Emerson (1987). The writer, also, was neither qualified to instruct a formal class (as a classroom teacher), nor to supervise another teacher in his/her instruction of such a class.

Programs which are directed toward involving parents generally incorporate the use of school facilities in establishing a resource library or workroom that is available to them, and rely on some activities being conducted after school hours. These programs are also dependent upon the parents' willingness to participate. As Wagenaar (1986) points out, low parental expectations are one of the contributing factors to lack of post graduation planning in high school students. Therefore, high need students would most likely have parents who are less willing to participate in such a program.

The use of career days and college nights was attractive. The weakness in this approach was that students are often provided with exposure to their options, but are not assisted with processing the information in order to make a decision. For

such programs to be successful, they must be incorporated into some kind of decision making or counseling format.

In light of research which indicates the relatively low amount of influence exerted by the guidance counselor in students' decision making, it appeared that the process of group counseling and guidance would be more effective than individual counseling. Use of a group counseling format would provide the opportunity to involve peer influence in the decision making process, and allow students to make a commitment to themselves and to other members of their group.

A highly desirable method of providing assistance with career decision making was through the use of computer-guided exploration programs. There was, however, a caveat which accompanied the use of these systems. Students could not be seated in front of a computer and abandoned - they had to receive assistance in formulating their search, gathering their data and processing what information they received into a coherent order that they could use in making post-high school plans.

Description and Justification for Selected Solution

After reviewing and evaluating the options above, it was determined that an eclectic approach to career decision making would be the most effective technique in the current setting. A combination of individual and group counseling would be used in working with students to create a post graduation plan. The counseling experience would incorporate the use of the Discover (ACT, 1991) computer-assisted career guidance program. Field

trips to appropriate sites, and presentations by members of the business community would also be employed where appropriate and feasible.

Four factors would contribute to the effectiveness of the proposed program. First, through the use and interpretation of personality inventories, students would gain self-knowledge that would be directly applicable to the world of work. Second, by interacting with their peers in a group setting, group members would build a commitment to the decision making process. Third, during the use of the Discover computer-assisted guidance program, each student would be closely monitored by the writer to provide interpretive explanations and other assistance as necessary. Finally, after obtaining first-hand exposure to some of the post graduation options which are available to them, students would be able to make more realistic and satisfying career decisions.

Report of Action Taken

Prior to implementation of the solution, the writer spoke with the seniors in her caseload, through their homerooms, to solicit volunteers for the program. As expected, more than the seven students who originally identified themselves as undecided volunteered to participate. Group membership was limited to twenty participants. Permission from the school's administration to implement the practicum and conduct related activities, such as arranging field trips and scheduling guest speakers, was obtained. Permission to use Discover (ACT, 1991) and the

Discover for High Schools Career Planning Guidebook (ACT, 1988) as a part of the practicum was solicited and obtained from the American College Testing Program, Inc. (ACT) (see Appendix C).

In the interim between soliciting volunteers and the actual beginning of the program, several of the students who had volunteered approached the writer repeatedly, asking about the program and when it would begin. This activity indicated the students' need for career choice assistance, and their enthusiasm for participating in such a process.

In order to maximize the students' time in the group, and minimize their time out of class, it was agreed during the first meeting that the group would meet once weekly during the lunch cycle. That arrangement provided a two-hour block of time for meeting, while requiring that each student would miss only one class period. The writer furnished pizza for lunch during the meetings, and students brought cold drinks or anything else they wished to eat for lunch.

Students met in a group guidance setting to begin the program, and conduct a needs assessment and personal inventory. During the first meeting the writer explained the purpose and nature of the program, and answered questions posed by the students. Students introduced themselves in turn, and told what expectations they had, at that point, for their life after graduation. The group members then completed the Uniact Interest Inventory (pp. 9-10), the Abilities Inventory (pp. 9-10), the Experience Inventory (pp. 11-13), the Values Inventory (pp. 14-

15), and the Selecting Occupations exercise (pp. 16-17), from the Discover for High Schools Career Planning Guidebook (ACT, 1988). During these activities, the writer explained the purpose of each inventory before it was administered, and reviewed each item with the group as its members moved through the various instruments together. Completing the above instruments in such a manner required more time than allowed, so a second meeting was conducted on the next day in order to finish completing all of the materials. Students began individual career folders in which they kept their career information, and any notes and ideas they generated.

Group members were then scheduled for individual sessions with the counselor to review their inventories and use them in an interactive session with the Discover computer-assisted guidance program. During each individual session, the student and writer entered the student's responses from the various inventories into the appropriate sections of the Discover program, and generated a list of possible occupations. The writer discussed the implications and clarified the results with each student as he/she progressed through the career choice system. Each student took an average of two, one-hour sessions to generate a complete list of possible occupations based on his/her interests, values, temperaments, and job characteristic preferences. All students had completed the Discover exercises and generated a list of realistic career choices by the end of the second week.

During the interim meeting, conducted prior to all students having completed their career exploration, the group members met to discuss their progress at that point with the Discover system, share ideas, and clarify any questions. This meeting provided an opportunity for those students who had completed the program to share their findings with the other members and gain peer support for their efforts. It also served to encourage those students who had not yet completed their career search, and gave them some insight as to what they could expect to encounter in using the computer-assisted search program.

The third group meeting, held after all members had completed their career search and generated a list of realistic job choices, began with reviewing the Discover career search information and relating it to the World of Work Map (ACT, 1988), then using the map in conjunction with their list of occupations to narrow down the field of occupational choices. Focus then shifted to determining what activities would be most appropriate for meeting the needs of the group members. Due to the diversity of career choices among members, it was decided that a guest speaker and series of field trips would be appropriate.

The following activities were arranged as a result of this meeting, and will be discussed individually in chronological order below: a presentation from a representative of the local office of the State Job Service; a tour of the career center and training programs located at the smaller of two local public adult vocational centers; tours of two of the campuses of the

local community college; a tour of the district's primary adult vocational center; and finally, a tour of the sites of two of the community's major employers, in this case a hospital and the local airport (which is a regional and international airport). The tours were to be arranged on alternate weeks, allowing for a regular group meeting after each tour in order to process the information received and incorporate it into each group member's occupational information. A Field Trip Evaluation form (see Appendix D) was designed to assist group members with recording and processing the personally relevant information from each tour.

During the fourth session a representative from the local office of the State Job Service conducted a presentation on career preparation and job search skills. She provided the students with local labor market information, and literature on job preparation and job search skills. During the second hour of the session a discussion was conducted to process the information provided by her, and incorporate it into the students' tentative goals and plans.

The fifth week was the first field trip of the program, to the smaller of two public adult vocational centers in the district. The students participated in the work evaluation program at the career center, then had a tour of the programs housed at the facility. The work evaluation program at the vocational center differed from the Discover materials in that it

incorporated actual performance tests, such as finger and manual dexterity exercises.

During the sixth meeting, on the week following the tour to the vocational center, the work evaluation coordinator from its career center attended and met with each student individually to review and interpret his/her results from the work evaluation conducted the previous week. A group discussion of the tour and work evaluation experience was conducted, then students completed a Field Trip Evaluation form, recording any personally relevant information.

On the seventh week the group participated in tours of two of the four campuses of the local community college. The first campus visited had an emphasis on fine and performing arts. The second, and larger, campus had an emphasis on health, business and technology.

During the group meeting on the eighth week students processed their experiences at the community college. A discussion ensued on making career decisions, and using the input that was being gathered during the field trips and interim sessions. Some students indicated that they had begun the application process for the community college. Others stated that they were looking forward to the tour of the district's major adult vocational center on the following week.

The tour of the district's major adult vocational center was conducted on the ninth week of the practicum's group sessions. The program provided exposure to all of the widely diverse

programs available at the school, and also provided the students with placement and salary information for graduates from the various programs.

The tenth group meeting was conducted to process the information received during the tour on the previous week. Students discussed the vocational center and recorded relevant notes on a Field Trip Evaluation form. A discussion then ensued about students' plans for after high school.

Tours of a local hospital and the regional airport were conducted during the eleventh group session. Both tours were geared toward the perspective of preparing for and obtaining employment in the respective work settings. Students were encouraged to obtain applications while at the airport, and as a result, two students received job offers during the day of the tour.

The students decided to conduct a cultural luncheon as a part of their twelfth, and final, group session. Since the group members participating represented a wide diversity of ethnic backgrounds, the cuisine was equally diverse and interesting. The tours of the previous week were discussed, and the two students who received jobs at the airport related their experiences to the rest of the group. Students completed a Field Trip Evaluation form, relating their experiences during the tours to their personal career goals. The program was summarized through group discussion, finishing with each member explaining his/her post high school plans to the other members of the group.

Each member then completed the Post Practicum Survey (see Appendix B) as the final activity of the program. In the survey students identified their plans for after high school, and listed the steps and time frame they intended to follow to achieve their plan. The writer analyzed the students' responses to the Post Practicum Survey to determine if each student had been able to formulate a realistic career plan as a result of the practicum implementation.

CHAPTER V

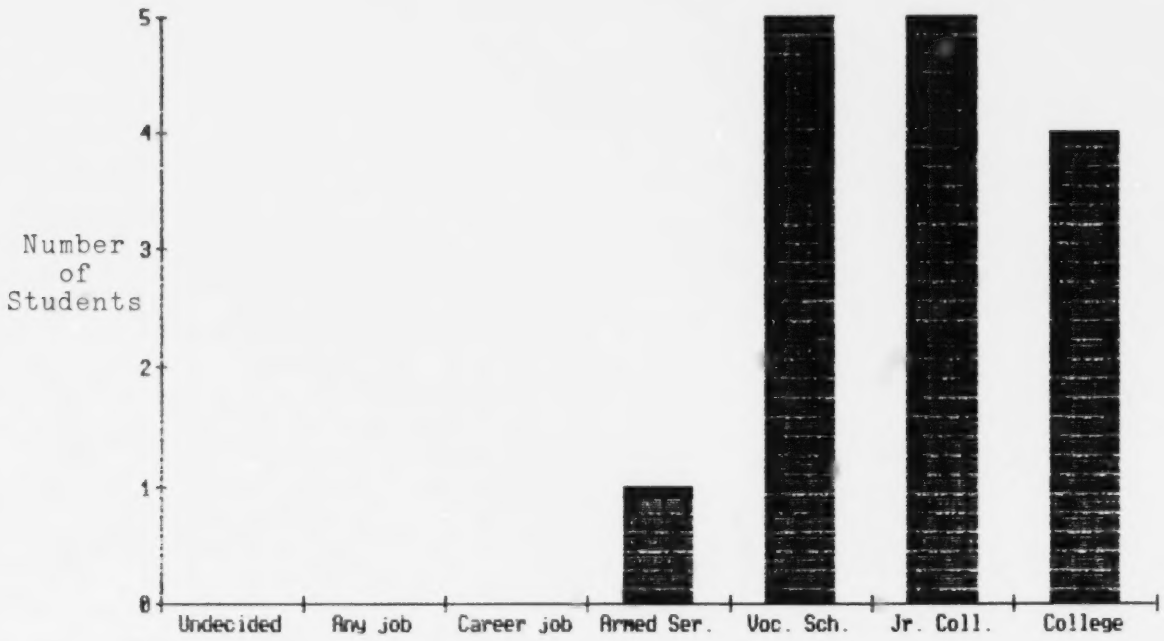
RESULTS, DISCUSSION, and RECOMMENDATIONS

The problem addressed by this practicum was the need by seniors for assistance with formulating post graduation plans. The solution strategy utilized was an eclectic approach, using a combination of self-inventories, a computer-assisted career exploration program, group and individual guidance experiences, guest speakers, and tours of adult educational and employment sites.

Results

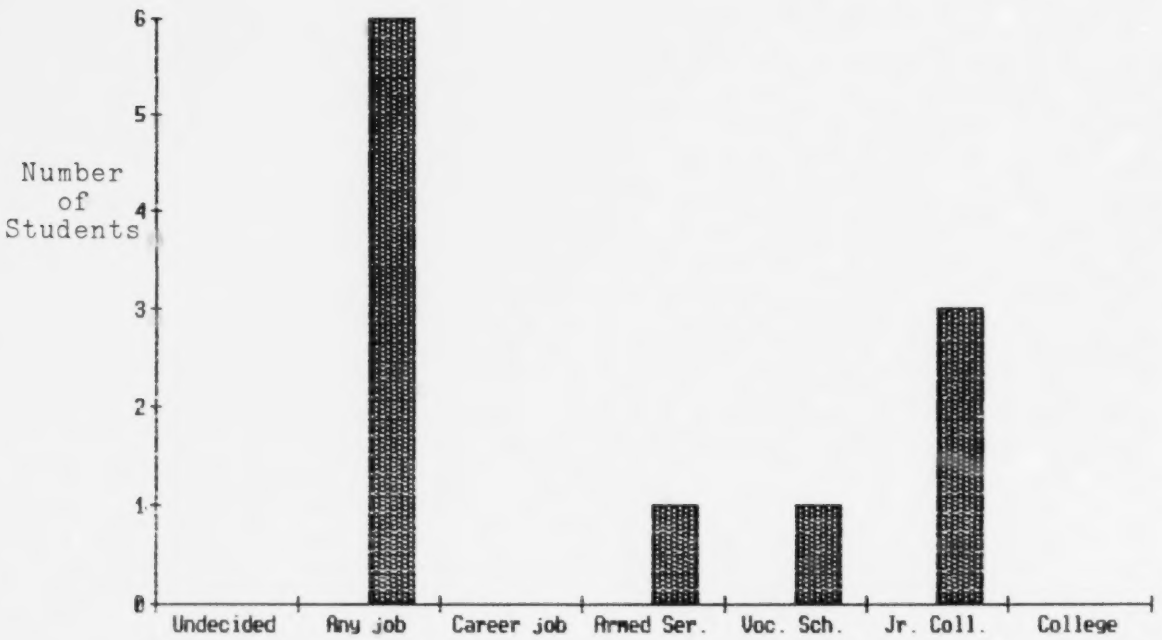
The Post Practicum Surveys, completed by each group member during the final group session, indicated that all seniors who participated in the practicum had a definite course of action to follow after graduation (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Summary of participating high school seniors' responses to a survey on post high school plans administered by the writer at the end of the practicum implementation, May 27, 1992. (N=15)



Each student was able to outline his/her plan and provide dates or time frames for each step. None of the students participating in the practicum responded to the survey about post-graduation plans with an answer of "undecided". As indicated by the data represented in Figure 6, eleven of the fifteen participating seniors also included short range goals as part of their post-graduation plan.

Figure 6. Summary of short-term goals indicated by participating seniors responding to a survey of post high school plans administered by the writer at the end of the practicum implementation, May 27, 1992. (n=11)



Discussion

The eclectic approach used in this practicum seemed to provide an effective means of successfully resolving the problem of assisting high school seniors in creating realistic post graduation plans. The use and interpretation of personality inventories provided the participants with self-knowledge that they were able to apply directly to the world of work. As evidenced by the luncheon organized by the students as part of the final meeting, the group setting contributed to the students' building a commitment to each other, and to their own decision making process. The Discover computer-assisted guidance program

provided a concise and readily accessible source of occupational information. By visiting actual post-secondary training sites, hearing presentations from guest speakers, and touring job sites, the students were able to obtain first-hand information about the options available to them.

Some difficulties were encountered, and will be discussed below. Group size and diversity provided some difficulty at times. The original number of twenty students narrowed to fifteen by the third meeting, and remained stable after that. Fifteen students, however, still proved to be too many to keep on task at times, especially during group discussions or writing activities. The students participating in the group varied widely in their level of academic achievement. It was difficult at times to gear a presentation toward the lower level students in the group while keeping the interest of the more advanced students.

The heterogeneity of the group also posed a problem in organizing meaningful tours and presentations. There were members in the group who would be attending college, and others who would be participating in on-the-job training or vocational training programs after graduation. It was a challenge to arrange programs that would meet the needs of all of them, without alienating some faction of the group.

The Discover program, while extremely effective, was very time consuming to use, especially with the lower level students, where explanations of the material presented by the computer

program often took longer. As Roselle and Thomas (1988) admonished, these students consumed much of the writer's time. As Gati and Tikotzki (1989) emphasized, it is essential that some direction be provided, so that the user does not become overwhelmed by the huge amount of information available through such a program. Gleaning meaningful information from the Discover program was the most cumbersome, although valuable, segment of the program.

Finally, the timing of the practicum might have been better. Crowding the practicum into the final weeks of school, when seniors were distracted by end-of-the-year and graduation activities, was not the best strategy in terms of timing. Beginning such a career exploration program at the beginning of the senior year, or even during the middle of a student's junior year might be more advantageous. The seniors who participated in the practicum were sometimes so distracted by other events that the writer wondered if any progress was being made. Also, although such an intense approach as was used here has its advantages, spreading the career decision making program over more time, or incorporating additional tours and activities might be more effective.

By far, the feature of the practicum with the greatest impact was the incorporation of tours to training and employment sites. It was fascinating to observe the students reacting to the information they received. They were able to see, first hand, what they had heard teachers, parents, and peers talk

about. By asking questions and receiving information from personnel at the tour sites, the students were able to glean information directly from the "experts", rather than getting second-hand information from other sources. The discussions held during the interim meetings were lively, and generally focused on relating the students' needs and plans to the previous week's tour experience. Time was also spent preparing for the next week's tour by discussing the location of the tour, the nature of the facility to be visited, and by generating ideas about how students might relate information gathered there to their individual career plans.

The high point of the tour series was when two students returned to the employment offices at the airport after the tour to pick up applications. They were detained, interviewed, and offered jobs on the spot. Bringing this information into the group had a strongly reinforcing effect. It was mildly surprizing to suddenly hear these students talking about dental and medical benefits, and describing tuition reimbursement plans available through their new employer. The experience provided strong encouragement to the other members of the group by demonstrating that getting a good job, even as a short-term goal, could be accomplished.

The maintenance of career planning folders (Burkhardt, et al., 1977) proved to be a valuable exercise. By keeping all of the students' materials together in one place, the activities conducted in the group setting were better organized and ran more

efficiently. The information each student maintained in his/her folder was personally relevant to that student, and each student referred to that information regularly during the practicum implementation.

In summary, although timing, group size and heterogeneity were perceived as stumbling blocks to the smooth operation of the practicum implementation, the eclectic approach used in this situation appears to have worked effectively. All of the students who participated benefitted from the combination of individual and group techniques, employing self-exploration exercises, the Discover computer-assisted career search program, guest speakers, tours of schools and employment sites, and regular, structured group discussions to integrate all of the information obtained into a meaningful post-high school plan. Each student was able to outline their post-high school plan, even to the extent of delineating short-term goals, where applicable.

Recommendations

1. A career exploration program such as the one used in this practicum implementation should be scheduled for earlier in the school year, or previous to a student's senior year.
2. An attempt should be made to group students heterogeneously, according to diploma track or level of academic achievement.
3. Maintain a group size of 8 - 10 participants.

4. In order to reduce the time dedicated to using the Discover program with students, more than one counselor should be involved in that portion of the career search program.
5. Incorporate a post-high school planning program, such as the practicum implementation, into the guidance program at the school, and offer it to all students, regardless of level of achievement or diploma track, starting perhaps, with the lower level, non-college bound students first.
6. Establish a working relationship with major training sites and employers in the area, and arrange for tours to be provided to students at regular intervals during the school year.
7. Offer the above program to students on a rotating basis, so that all students would have the opportunity to participate before graduation.

Dissemination

The practicum report will be disseminated to classmates and other professionals through Nova University. A copy of the report will also be provided to the Testing and Evaluation Office in the writer's school district, and to the principal and guidance department head (practicum verifier) at the writer's school. Outcomes will be discussed with members of the guidance staff at the writer's school, and with counselors at other high schools in the writer's district. Should any interest be shown,

the writer will provide a copy of the report to any colleague who requests it.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PRE-PRACTICUM SURVEY OF POST GRADUATION PLANS FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

Pre-practicum Survey

Please finish the statement below as honestly as you can. Thank you.

After graduation, I plan to: (select one)

( ) I am undecided about what I want to do

( ) get any job I can

( ) get a full-time job leading to a career

( ) go into the Armed Services

( ) attend a vocational school

( ) attend a two-year college such as HCC

( ) attend a four-year college/university

APPENDIX B

POST-PRACTICUM SURVEY OF POST GRADUATION PLANS FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

Post-practicum Survey

Please finish the statement below as honestly as you can. Thank you.

After graduation, I plan to: (select one)

( ) I am undecided about what I want to do

( ) get any job I can

( ) get a full-time job leading to a career

( ) go into the Armed Services

( ) attend a vocational school

( ) attend a two-year college such as HCC

( ) attend a four-year college/university

To achieve my goal, I will: (fill in your plan, if you have one)

_____

_____

_____

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My time line for completing these steps, is: (write in dates or weeks, months, years)

_____

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APPENDIX C

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION AND LETTER OF PERMISSION TO USE DISCOVER AS A COMPONENT OF THE PRACTICUM

P.O.Box 13714

February 26, 1992

American College Testing Program, Inc.
Educational Services Division
P.O.Box 168
Iowa City, Iowa 52243

Greetings:

The purpose of this correspondence is to request permission to use the Discover computer guided exploration system and the accompanying Discover for High Schools Career Planning Guidebook with a group of my students as part of my practicum project. I am currently employed as a guidance counselor at Senior High School in , . My school purchases the Discover service yearly. I am working on my Doctorate of Education through Nova University, and am required to conduct a practicum as part of my doctoral work.

The practicum I have proposed involves conducting a series of group and individual counseling sessions with seniors who are, as yet, undecided as to what they will do after graduation. My intention is to have them complete the personal inventories in the guidebook in a group setting, then use the Discover program individually, under my supervision, to determine which career areas are appropriate for them.

Field trips and guest speakers will then be arranged to provide the students in the group with additional first-hand information on their possible career choices. At the end of the practicum, the students will complete the Action Plan portion of the guidebook. Pre- and post-assessments will be conducted using a simple tool of my design. I do not anticipate having to reproduce any of your materials for inclusion in my practicum proposal or report.

I hope my intended use of your materials meets with your approval. A self-addressed, stamped envelope has been enclosed to facilitate your reply to my request.

Thanking you in advance,

March 10, 1992

We are pleased you wish to use Discover in your practicum and grant permission for the use described in your March 3 letter. If you do decide to reproduce any of our printed material, please use a standard credit line and indicate that the materials are used with our permission.

Sincerely,

PhD
Assistant Vice President
Public Affairs

/dvh

2201 North Dodge Street, P.O. Box 168
Iowa City, Iowa 52243
(319) 337-1000

APPENDIX D

FIELD TRIP EVALUATION FORM

FIELD TRIP EVALUATION

Date: _____

Location: _____

Points of Interest: _____

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Questions: _____

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Ideas for applying this experience to my life: _____

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Notes: _____

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